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Chicago Bulls Three-peat

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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June 20, 1993 will be remembered in sport history as the day that the Chicago Bulls defeated the Phoenix Suns in the American West Arena to win the 1992-93 NBA Championship and a Three-peat. It is only the third time in NBA history a team has won the championship three years in a row.

It also was the eve of the All England Lawn Tennis Championship at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, better known as Wimbledon.

But that isn't the only thing significant about the date. It was the latest NBA championship final in history, as this winter indoor sport crowned its champion within but a few hours of the official beginning of summer. A technicality to be sure, as the temperatures in Phoenix had long since hit the century mark, and those in Chicago had hit the mid-90s.

All of this is a testimony to the distortion of the seasons that has taken place in the name of money and sport and television.

But back to the NBA story. Is this Chicago Bulls team truly one of the great teams in the history of the NBA? No doubt it is, although maybe not in the same sense as the Boston Celtic and Minneapolis Laker teams that dominated in an earlier era.

Several things are worth noting about the Bulls achievement. First, the number of playoff games the Bulls had to play and win was much greater than those teams of an earlier era. The 1953-54 Minneapolis Laker Championship team, the three-peat team, won only 9 playoff games, after a regular season of only 70 games. The 1965-66 Boston championship team needed to win 11 playoff games after a regular season of 80 games. Chicago on the other hand needed to win 15 playoff games after a regular season of 82 games.

In addition travel in the both the regular season and the playoffs is much more rigorous, and the glare of publicity and the demands of the media place much greater pressure on the players of today than those of an earlier era who toiled in relative obscurity. Certainly the pace of the game, the Minneapolis Lakers did not play in the era of the 24 second clock, is different, and the general level of talent through the league is probably higher now than ever before.

However it should be remembered that the Lakers won not only three in a row, but five Championships in six years. The Celtics were even more dominant, winning championships in twelve of fifteen years from the late fifties through the sixties, with one stretch of eight straight championships. A mere three-peat doesn't come close to matching the Celtic dominance, and even the Laker achievement is a bit more impressive than that of the Bulls.

This is not to slight the Chicago Bulls. This team led by Michael Jordan would easily defeat those Laker teams, and even some of those Celtic championship teams. Suffice it to say that the Chicago Bulls have done something not done in almost three decades, and something that has been done only twice in the modern era. Suffice it also to say that Michael Jordan is the greatest player in the history of the game.

Meanwhile in England the Wimbledon fortnight is underway and looking very much like General Hospital. Most all of the big name players are nursing injuries, with defending men's champion Andre Agassi suffering from tendinitis of the wrist which has kept him out of action for the past several months. Pete Sampras has shoulder problems in the serving shoulder, and Boris Becker has his usual head problems stemming from his personal life.

On the grass at Wimbledon the big hitters are always a threat to win, or at least knock out some of the big names. Michael Stich, who won in 1991, is one of those, but also there is Goran Ivanisevic, Richard Krajicek, and Andre Medvedev. As to Stefan Edberg, he is always a favorite in any grand slam event, and seems to be there near the end of the second of the week of competition.

On the women's side Monica Seles is not there at all following her knifing in the back, and so it would appear that defending champion Steffi Graf is the prohibitive favorite to win her fifth Ladies' Championship in six years. Standing in her way, and not a particularly ominous sight are Gabriela Sabatini, Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, and Mary Jo Fernandez. Fernandez has been playing very well lately and could be a big surprise here. But the greatest pressure on Graf may be from the lunatic who is stalking her.

And then there is Martina Navratilova, who is looking for her 10th singles title at this 100th Ladies championship at Wimbledon. She hasn't won since 1990, but she just might catch lightning in a bottle. And wouldn't that be fun!?

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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